

WANALA: Growing representation of Aboriginal languages

9th December, 2015

A large number of representatives from the Western and Northern Aboriginal Languages Alliance (WANALA) met in Perth recently to share ideas on how best to deal with the issues currently being faced by Aboriginal language centres.

WANALA is funded by the Commonwealth Government's Indigenous Languages and the Arts program, and was established to represent the unique and pressing challenges facing languages across the West Australian and Northern Territory regions, which is home to more than 150 Indigenous languages.

Following on from earlier successful meetings and conferences in WA and NT, the recent meeting, hosted by the Langford Aboriginal Association, provided WANALA's growing number of member organisations the opportunity to discuss and share their challenges and successes in the context of tight funding and growing pressures on the maintenance of traditional languages.

Member organisations have responded strategically to these pressures through the streamlining of operations, increased entrepreneurial activities, adoption of digital technologies, and increased use of interns and volunteers.

The meeting also included professional development sessions on financial management, as well as hands-on development of multimedia apps to support and reinforce language teaching and revitalisation efforts.

The languages of the WANALA region present significant challenges: the majority belong to remote country where access can be difficult and costs are high, and the sheer number of languages mean that some language centres are supporting as many as 25 different languages. Nevertheless, the region hosts the largest share of living and spoken Indigenous languages in Australia, so WANALA's work forms a crucial part of the national heritage and identity.

WANALA was established in 2014 and is managed by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education through the Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics; further information can be found on the WANALA website <http://wanala.org>.



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